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THE RUPTURE BETWEEN ALEXANDER JANNAI AND THE PHARISEES

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THE famous incident over the festival board which led to the open rupture between the Pharisees and the Hasmonean ruler is referred by Josephus¹ to John Hyrcan, by the Talmud² to Alexander Jannai. The consensus of opinion among modern scholars, both Jewish and Christian,³ follows Josephus. Derenbourg⁴ goes even so far as to suggest that the Talmud itself has John Hyrcan in mind, whom it designates through an inaccuracy occurring elsewhere in Talmudic literature as Jannai. This supposition, however, is entirely inadmissible. For not only is it contradicted by the royal title which is affixed to Jannai's name⁵ and forms the climax of the whole incident,⁶ but also by the whole background of the Talmudic account which, as will

¹ *Ant.*, XIII, 10, 5-6.

² b. *Ḳiddushin* 66 a. The variants of Codex Munich (phototypic edition by Strack) are of no considerable importance. Some of them will be noticed below.

³ It will suffice to mention among the former Grätz (*Geschichte*, III⁴, 114) and Weiss (*דור דור ודורשי*, I, 126), and among the latter Wellhausen (*Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*³, 290) and Schürer (I, 271 f.).

⁴ *Essai sur l'histoire et la géographie de la Palestine*, 79 f. Grätz's remark (*Geschichte*, III, 653, l. 7 from below) seems to imply a similar view, but his words are not quite clear.

⁵ *ינאי המלך*, repeatedly in the Talmudic passage.

⁶ *רב לך כתר מלכות*.

presently be shown, clearly points to the reign of Jannai. The Talmudic narrative is unmistakably a different version of the story told by Josephus and disagrees with the latter not only in the names of the heroes but also in the fundamental character of the incident.

When we examine these two versions in the light of the general historical situation, we shall find, so it seems to me, that we have every reason to give the Talmudic account the preference over that of Josephus. For Josephus's version is in strange contradiction with his own enthusiastic estimate of John Hyrcan. Had John's disagreement with the Pharisees, who, to quote Josephus,⁷ 'have so great a power over the multitude that when they say anything against the king, or against the high priest, they are presently believed', assumed that intensity which is presupposed in the story, his reign would have scarcely ended as peacefully and happily, as Josephus is careful to point out, contrasting Hyrcan's fate with the unhappy lot of his successors.⁸ Nor could possibly such a fact be reconciled with the popular admiration for Hyrcan which is voiced both by Josephus and the Talmud,⁹ and which goes so far as to attribute to him the gift of prophecy manifesting itself at the end of his reign.¹⁰ The whole story points clearly to the unfortunate conditions as they existed in the time of Jannai and, when looked at in this light, the Talmudic account, though curtailed in some parts, receives its proper historical setting such as we would seek in vain in the version of Josephus.

Alexander Jannai had returned in triumph from his numerous military exploits, having, as the legend none too

⁷ *Ant.*, XIII, 10, 5.

⁸ *loc. cit.*, XIII, 10, 7.

⁹ For the Talmudic data comp. Derenbourg, *loc. cit.*, 70 ff., and Weiss, *loc. cit.*, 116 ff.

¹⁰ *Ant.*, XIII, 10, 3, and b. *Soṭah* 33 a.

exaggeratedly puts it, conquered sixty cities in the desert.¹¹ The Pharisees, and with them the people, had for many years been smarting under the shameful incongruity between the wild character of Jannai and the sacred office he occupied. It seemed a terrible indignity to them that this worldly monarch and rude warrior, who gloried in the royal title which Jewish tradition had reverently set apart for the ideal Messianic ruler of the House of David,¹² and, completely estranged from the spirit of Judaism, pursued a policy of conquest and bloodshed, should officiate as the highest religious representative of the nation. In addition to these general considerations, there was, as we learn from an incidental statement of Josephus, which has been entirely overlooked in the discussion of our subject, a widespread belief among the people that Jannai's mother had, evidently as a young girl, been taken captive by the Syrians,¹³ and that her son was, in consequence, even from the strictly legal point of view, unfit for the sacred office of high priest. Jannai, on the other hand, thought, and, to judge by his mental make-up, could not but think so, that he might be able to conciliate or at least to intimidate his Pharisaic opponents by his military achievements,

¹¹ שהלך לבחולית שבמדבר וביש שם ששים כריבים. This evidently refers to Jannai's trans-Jordanic campaigns. The number would be an inadmissible exaggeration in the case of Hyrcan.

¹² Comp. Grätz, III, 653 f. The resentment of the people would be still more justified if Strabo's statement were correct, that the royal title was first assumed by Jannai (Grätz, *ibid.*). In any event, he was the first titular king of any importance, for Aristobulus who, according to Josephus, had before him assumed that title, reigned for barely two years. It is characteristic that in Rabbinic literature Jannai figures as ינאי המלך, while his father is regularly designated as יוחנן כהן גדול.

¹³ *Ant.*, XIII, 14, 5: While he was being pelted with citrons, the people reviled him as the son of a captive.

and he invited them to the banquet which was to commemorate his victories.

It was evidently a grand affair. At least, the legend carefully informs us that they sat at golden tables.¹⁴ The Pharisees, we need not doubt, accepted the invitation reluctantly. A certain mischief-maker by the name of Eleazar ben Po'ira, 'frivolous, wicked, and good for nothing',¹⁵ called Jannai's attention to the thinly-veiled resentment of the Pharisees.¹⁶ To test their sentiments he suggested that Jannai, who was naturally to appear in his state robes, should, instead of the royal crown, wear the high priestly diadem on which the Divine name was inscribed, so as to emphasize his spiritual dignity before those who were prone to question it.¹⁷ This was clearly an affront intended

¹⁴ והעלו מלוחים על שולחנות של זהב. The mallows were to contrast the struggling condition of the second commonwealth in its beginnings with the present power and prosperity of the kingdom. Comp. Rashi *ad locum*.

¹⁵ ובלעל (Cod. Munich omits לב, which is probably a dittography of לץ, unless we read לב רע). Josephus's description of Eleazar as 'a man of ill temper and delighting in seditious practices' (*Ant.*, XIII, 10, 5) is in substantial agreement with that of the Talmud, and only fits the rôle of intriguer which is assigned to him in the Talmudic version, but not the part ascribed to him by Josephus. This alone shows the secondary character of the latter's version. The omission of Judah ben Gedidiah (see note 18) in Josephus's account had evidently created a gap which had to be filled out artificially by redistributing the rôles.

¹⁶ לבם של פרושים עליך. The expression obviously refers not to their open actions but to their inner feelings.

¹⁷ הקם להם בציון שבין עיניך. The phrase is difficult. Israel Lévy (*Revue des Études Juives*, XXXV, 222, n. 1) openly confesses not to know its meaning. Grätz (III, 687) doubtfully interprets להם הקם as 'to test', without adducing any proof in support of this meaning. Rashi takes it in the sense of making them rise : תן ציון הקרש על מצחק ויעמדו על רגליהם : לפי שהשם כתוב בו והם יגלו את לבם למחות בך מהיות בהן. Rashi's explanation is perfectly natural when taken in the connexion suggested by us.

for the Pharisees, and one of their number, Judah ben Gedidiah,¹⁸ forgot himself¹⁹ and remonstrated. We now understand the full purport of his passionate protest: if Jannai had usurped the royal crown which is the prerogative of the Davidic house,²⁰ let him, at least, leave the priestly diadem to the descendants of Aaron.²¹ When asked for his reasons, Judah, instead of shielding himself behind general vague sentiments, pointed to the specific charge involved in the popular rumour regarding Jannai's mother.²² What thereupon happened, the Talmud does not tell us, though we can easily imagine that Jannai did not remain silent. It seems that the Pharisees left the table in indignation.²³ The charge against Jannai's mother could not be substantiated. The result, which is more fully described by Josephus, was an open breach between

¹⁸ גְּדִידִים, as is found in some editions (comp. Weiss, *loc. cit.*, 126, and Grätz, III, 114, 'Gedidim'), is certainly incorrect. Cod. Munich reads several times גְּרִי'ל. Professor Marx calls my attention to the variant גְּוִדְנָא of Solomon ibn Adret, *ad locum*. It is scarcely conceivable that a name of this unusual type should be a pure invention on the part of the Talmudic version.

¹⁹ That the Talmud does not approve of his hasty conduct may be inferred from the reading of Cod. Munich (note 24). Grätz (III, 114) artificially harmonizes the Talmud with Josephus, and makes Gedidiah address the king at his own invitation 'with the best of intentions'!

²⁰ Compare note 12.

²¹ רַב לָךְ כְּתֵר מַלְכוּת הֵנָּה כְּתֵר כְּהוֹנָה לִוְרְעוֹ שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן.

²² The Talmudic version is evidently curtailed here. For the words שהיו אומרים אמו נשבת במוריעים cannot be those of Judah.

²³ The phrase חכמי ישראל בועם ויבדלו has not yet been satisfactorily explained. The meaning proposed in the text suggests itself naturally. Perhaps we ought to transpose the text slightly, and read ויבדלו חכמי ישראל ויבוקש הדבר ולא נמצא, which is obviously a copyist's error. — On the חכמי ישראל as identical with the Pharisees comp. Lauterbach, 'Sadducees and Pharisees' (reprint from *Studies in Jewish Literature*, issued in honour of Kaufmann Kohler), pp. 16 ff.

Jannai and the Pharisees. The struggle, which had been precipitated by the mischievous insinuations of Eleazar ben Po'ira and the hasty indiscretion of Judah ben Gedidiah,²⁴ grew so intense that the Pharisaic leaders were executed.²⁵

Interpreted in this light, the Talmudic story, while legendary in detail, may well reflect an historic fact. Its divergence from Josephus may perhaps be best explained on the supposition that it reached the historian in a different version, in which the names had been garbled and the whole incident referred to Hyrcan. Josephus embodied this version in his history, and in order to harmonize it in some measure with his enthusiastic account of Hyrcan who, as he tells us, was greatly beloved by the Pharisees,²⁶ he was forced to supply a different psychological motive for the incident, by describing in a rather melodramatic fashion how Hyrcan, whose righteousness was readily conceded by the Pharisees, invited their open and unreserved criticism.

The Talmudic account is undoubtedly, as was suggested long ago,²⁷ a fragment from an old historic source.²⁸ But if the above interpretation of the Talmud passage as referring to Jannai be accepted, the ingenious conjecture of Grätz,²⁹ who identifies our source with the history of John Hyrcan referred to in 1 Macc. 16. 24, will have to be abandoned.

²⁴ This estimate of Judah's conduct is suggested by the reading of Cod. Munich וְהַיְיָצִין (וְהַיְיָצִין) הָרַעָה עַיִי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן פּוּעִירָה וְעַיִי יְהוּדָה בֶּן גִּדְיָה (ed. וְהַיְיָצִין). R. Nissim, *Mafteah to Berakot* 48a, in a quotation of this sentence to which Professor Marx directs my attention, reads similarly שֶׁנֶּחֱלַגְלָה הָרַעָה עַיִי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן פּוּעִירָה וְעַיִי יְהוּדָה בֶּן גִּדְיָה.

²⁵ Grätz (III, 688) is bound to admit that this can only apply to Jannai.

²⁶ *Ant.*, XIII, 10, 5.

²⁷ Grätz, III, 82; Israel Lévy (*Revue des Études Juives*, loc. cit. .

²⁸ It is introduced in the Talmud as a Baraita.

²⁹ III, 82.